

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NASSAU 1584

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, CGEN, BF, HA
SUBJECT: ILLEGAL HAITIAN ALIENS

REF STATE 185416

1. ON JULY 24 AND 25, DCM RAISED QUESTIONS POSED BY REFTEL WITH MR. A. ENOCH BACKFORD, ACTING DIRECTOR OF IMMIGRATION, AND MR. L. M. TURNQUEST, ACTING PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND HOME AFFAIRS.

2. BOTH OFFICIALS WERE CONSISTENT IN THEIR APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM IN GENERAL AND IN REPLY TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS. FOLLOWING ARE THEIR RESPONSES TO LETTERED QUESTIONS IN REFTEL:

(A) THE HAITIAN ROUNDUP IS VIEWED AS A CONTINUING PROCESS AIMED AT BOTH HAITIANS AND JAMAICANS, WITH PRIMARY FOCUS ON HAITIANS. ROUNDUP DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN CUSTODY, EITHER SHORT OR LONG TERM, ALTHOUGH 370 HAITIANS WERE IMPRISONED FOR A DAY OR TWO DURING THE MOST RECENT OPERATION BEGINNING JUNE 11. (NASSAU 1288).

(B) 140 HAITIANS WERE REPATRIATED AT EXPENSE OF GCOB TO HAITI BY BOAT LAST WEEK AND ABOUT 150 MORE ARE SCHEDULED TO GO JULY 26. TURNQUEST SAID THE GCOB HOPES TO SEND ABOUT 150 BY BOAT EVERY TWO WEEKS AND EVENTUALLY ESTABLISH A PATTERN OF ABOUT ONE BOAT-LOAC A
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MONTH. HE ALSO NOTED THAT SOME ARE REPATRIATED PERIODICALLY BY AIRPLANE BUT COULD NOT PROVIDE ANY NUMERICAL ESTIMATES.

(C) AS NOTED IN RESPONSE (A), THE TERM "ROUND-UP" ONLY GIVES PART OF THE PICTURE. RELATIVE TO THE NUMBERS OF ILLEGAL ALIENS IN THE BAHAMAS, FEW ILLEGAL HAITIANS ARE ACTUALLY ARRESTED AND HELD FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME. ROUNDUPS ARE MORE NOTE-WORTHY FOR THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON THE HAITIAN COMMUNITY IN THE BAHAMAS.

(D) BACKFORD SAID THAT THE GCOB ESTIMATED ABOUT 3 YEARS AGO THAT THERE WERE 20-25,000 ILLEGAL HAITIANS HERE. TURNQUEST SAID THERE ARE PROBABLY FEWER THAN THAT, BUT BOTH OFFICIALS SAID THAT THE GCOB DOES NOT HAVE AN ACCURATE COUNT AND IS WORKING FROM ESTIMATES ONLY. IT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED BY THE GCOB THAT IN RELATIVE TERMS OF NATIONAL POPULATION (225,000) AND ESTIMATED UNEMPLOYMENT (25PERCENT OF WORK FORCE), THE NUMBER IS TOO HIGH TO TOLERATE.

(E) ANY FOREIGN NATIONAL WHO ENTERS THE BAHAMAS WITHOUT BEING LEGALLY ADMITTED BY AN IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL ENTERS ILLEGALLY. MOST ILLEGAL HAITIANS ENTER BY BOAT. OTHERS ENTER WITH A VALID VISA BUT STAY BEYOND THE VISA'S EXPIRATION DATE. ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS DO NOT HAVE RECOURSE TO BAHAMIAN COURTS TO RESIST REPATRIATION. THEY CANNOT RECEIVE WORK PERMITS. ACCORDING TO LAW, WORK PERMITS FOR ALIENS CAN ONLY BE REQUESTED FROM OUTSIDE THE BAHAMAS ON THE BASIS OF A SPECIFIC AVAILABLE JOB TO FILL. BOTH BACKFORD AND TURNQUEST INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT UP UNTIL RECENTLY WORK PERMITS WERE GRANTED TO ALIENS WHO HAD ENTERED ILLEGALLY. FURTHER, ONCE A WORK PERMIT IS ISSUED, THE HOLDER IS BY DINT OF HAVING A WORK PERMIT NO LONGER CONSIDERED ILLEGAL. WORK PERMITS ARE USUALLY GRANTED FOR ONE YEAR AT A TIME AND CAN BE RENEWED. THE EMBASSY WILL OBTAIN THE TEXT OF APPROPRIATE IMMIGARTION LEGISLATION FOR TRANSMITTAL TO ARA/CAR BY POUCH.

(F) MESSRS. BACKFORD AND TURNQUEST STATED THAT GCOB LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS AGAINST ILLEGAL IMMIGRATIONS ARE VIGOROUS WITHIN THE LIMITS OF BAHAMIAN RESOURCES. MR. TURNQUEST SAID THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE MORE SUCCESS WHEN THE TWO NEW PATROL BOATS ARE ON STATION ABOUT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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END OF 1978. NEITHER MAN CITED ANY SPECIFIC LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS BEING TAKEN TO PREVENT HAITIAN OR OTHER ILLEGAL ALIENS DEPARTING THE BAHAMAS ON THEIR OWN. THEY BOTH ACKNOWLEDGED THE OBVIOUS FACT THAT MANY HAITIANS PREFER TO TRY TO ENTER THE US ILLEGALLY THAN TO AWAIT BAHAMIAN REPATRIATION TO HAITI.

(G) SEE (E) ABOVE FOR DISCUSSION OF WORK PERMIT CONTROLS.

3. IN EMBASSY'S OPINION, GCOB WOULD COOPERATE WITH US IN JOINT EFFORT TO PREVENT ILLEGAL MOVEMENT OF HAITIANS TO FLORIDA AS LONG AS SUCH COOPERATION DID NOT ENTAIL GREAT DEAL OF EXPENSE OR MANPOWER ON PART OF GCOB. GCOB IS BEING PUSHED ON UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM AND SEES REMOVAL

OF ILLEGAL HAITIANS AS ONE POSSIBLE SOLUTION. THE GCOB IS REALLY INTERESTED IN GETTING HAITIANS OUT OF THE BAHAMAS. UNFORTUNATELY, EMBASSY DOES NOT SEE ANY ATTITUDE ON PART OF SENIOR GCOB OFFICIALS WHICH INDICATES THAT THEY CARE A GREAT DEAL ABOUT WHERE HAITIANS GO. IN VIEW OF THIS, TO EMPHASIZE US CONCERN, WE SUGGEST SOME HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIAL IN USG COME HERE TO DISCUSS PROBLEM. VISITING OFFICIAL SHOULD BE ABLE TO DISCUSS POLITICAL REMIFICATIONS OF PROBLEM AS WELL AS TECHNICAL AND ENFORCEMENT ASPECTS.

4. COMMENT: BOTH MESSRS. BACKFORD AND TURNQUEST WERE CAREFUL TO

DENY AND DISCLAIM US PRESS REPORTS AND ALLEGATIONS THAT THE GCOB IS ENCOURAGING A HAITIAN ALIEN EXODUS TO THE US. BOTH OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ROUNDUPS, ARRESTS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS AGAINST THE ILLEGAL ALIENS RESULT IN MANY OF THESE ALIENS LEAVING TO AVOID REPATRIATION OR OTHER GCOB ACTION AGAINST THEM. THEY BOTH ALSO AGREED THAT A LOGICAL DESTINATION FOR THE FLEEING HAITIANS IS FLORIDA. BY THEIR ATTITUDE AND COMMENTS BOTH OFFICIALS MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY VIEW THIS PROBLEM TO BE OUR PROBLEM, NOT THEIRS. THEIR DUTY, THEY SAID, IS TO THE CITIZENS AND LEGAL RESIDENTS OF THE BAHAMAS. THEY CITE GCOB POLICIES AND ACTIONS IN TERMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS, STREET CRIME AND OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE ALLEGEDLY COMMITTED BY HAITIANS AGAINST EACH OTHER AND AGAINST BAHAMIANS. UNDERLYING THIS IS A DEEPLY HELD BAHAMIAN PREJUDICE AGAINST HAITIANS IN GENERAL WHOM THEY PERCEIVE TO BE INFERIOR
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AND INTERLOPERS.
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